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The Life of the Irish Soldier in India:  
Representations and Self-Representations, 1857-1922

Alexander Bubb

Introduction: Yahoos in the Doab

It is November 1848, the opening days of the Second Anglo-Sikh War. Finding its advance across the Chenab blocked at Ramnagar, the Company force considers its options. Daniel Sandford, a young English subaltern, is told that one of his men has foolishly strayed beyond the pickets and been captured by enemy cavalry. When a few days later the soldier is magnanimously returned ‘with “Shere Singh’s compliments”’, Sandford notes wearily in his diary the reason why:

He is such a perfect fool that they could get nothing out of him. No more can we; though questioned by several of the staff, he could give no information whatever. He said that ‘the murdering thieves had tied him to a log, and put a guard over him;’ but ‘sorra a bit did he get to ate or drink,’ and he was half-famished. He is a perfect Yahoo – just caught from the wilds of Ireland, and can speak very little English. He belongs to my company, to its credit; but as we only want hands, not heads, it’s no matter.<sup>1</sup>

This episode of military history affords an ironic insight into the colonial army’s racial perceptions of itself. Here a metropolitan English officer mocks the comic behaviour of the Irish agricultural recruit. But when not managing the common soldiery this same officer was answering smartly to his commander-in-chief Sir Hugh Gough, born 1779 in County Limerick. The Duke of Wellington famously replied to the suggestion that he was an Irishman by pointing out that being born in a stable does not make a man a horse. But if, as we might hope, Sandford did not call his commanding officer a Yahoo this cannot be explained by assuming that Gough had forsworn his nationality and become an ‘honorary Englishman’. ‘Our band went to play at Lord Gough’s tent’, writes an anonymous grenadier in March of the following year, ‘it being St Patrick’s Day, and Lord Gough being a Son of Erin’s lovely isle. He ordered us an extra Dram of Rum per man.’<sup>2</sup>

How can this discrepancy be explained? Why is an officer who hands out rum to the music of the pipes on Paddy’s Day a ‘Son of Erin’ but the trooper who drinks it, dances a jig and gets himself captured an ‘Irish Yahoo’? The crucial distinction lies in this: whatever the unfortunate ranker was trying in his Gaelic-English argot to express was used by his interlocutor only to confirm a stereotype of the Irish ranker as foolish,

<sup>1</sup> Sandford, D.A. (1849). *Leaves from the Journal of a Subaltern during the Campaign in the Punjaub*, Blackwood, Edinburgh, pp.67-8.

<sup>2</sup> Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library (hereafter OIOC), Photo.Eur.97 (‘A Grenadier’s Diary’), p.97, 17 March 1849. All British Library quotations printed with permission of British Library.

drunken, a peasant, and laughable. But Gough invokes a slightly modulated image of Irish joviality and hospitality to raise his credibility with the men. It does not take an Irishman to comprehend the Celtic idiom – his observer was from Leicestershire. What Gough's behaviour demonstrates is that stereotyping the Irish was not always a hegemonic colonial discourse. It could be a dialectic. These are not different kinds of Irishmen but rather partakers in a general but broad set of qualities and vices called 'Irish', qualities that can be foisted on a subject as a stereotype or adopted as an identity. They can be used on a sliding scale of intensity and when worn voluntarily their interpretation by observers is inflected by the personality and social rank of the wearer. The Army is significant as the institution within which this Irishness is defined and from which it enters wider society. Its regimental culture provides the unifying structure in which a language of racial distinction can serve as common currency. India is significant as the foremost Imperial setting where this martial Irishness is represented in the popular media, and where for its Irish subjects it is experienced as a prefabricated identity. Lastly, from the Empire it is exported back Home, along with much else that constitutes what Ashis Nandy has called the 'cultural damage' sustained by the British – and, indeed, the Irish – in their strange brush with the Indian Subcontinent.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Stanley in his groundbreaking *White Mutiny* has examined how social conditions were reflected in the culture of the Company armies.<sup>4</sup> From the 1857 rebellion to Irish Independence in 1922, this paper proposes to suggest how, in the high noon of Empire, the colonial military became a means of comprehending national division in the United Kingdom. The questions it poses deal with the influence exercised by the army in forming public understanding of the Empire. How did military service in India contribute to stereotypes there and at home about the Irish? In fiction and popular media such as newspapers, ballads and recruiting posters, in regimental histories and military records, representations of Irish soldiers in India are not only numerous but extremely varied – even apparently contradictory at times. One romancer of the Bengal Army described these men as 'Protean'.<sup>5</sup> What purpose of the colonial power did they serve in assuming so many forms? Moreover, did they wear them with resentment, or voluntarily? How did Irishmen react to these stereotypes and hence how were their social implications in turn played out in India? Lastly, how did the Irish military identity coalesce or conflict with Irish nationalist identity in a period of increasing politicisation? To answer these latter questions, this paper draws on memoirs, letters and diaries – published and unpublished – written by officers and men of the British Army, Indian Army, and of the East India Company.<sup>6</sup>

This is a broad sweep of highly individual items, but its value lies in the very diversity of both sources and authors. Some are descriptions of India intended to be read by other soldiers, while retirement memoirs often map out a life structured by military service. In

<sup>3</sup> Nandy, A. (1983). *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.32.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley, P. (1998). *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India*, New York University Press, New York, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Bancroft, N.W. (1900). *From Recruit to Staff Sergeant*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Army Temperance Association Press, Simla (reprint: Hornchurch, 1979), p.29.

<sup>6</sup> That is, the British Indian Army.

these and often in letters home the author can be seen to project his identity upon the reader. Besides relating the bare facts of daily life, diaries and commonplace books comprise a private realm in which the writer can be seen to consider his position and formulate a response.

It is the ironic and occasionally vexed position of the Irish that makes them a valuable subject. They have attracted historical interest as colonial administrators, but it was for winning empire rather than ruling it that they were better known in this period. Their military service and their stereotype have been studied, but not soldiers' own reactions to their situation in India. Formally citizens of the United Kingdom, they contributed to and benefited from British overseas expansion. Yet the colonial management of their own country was enforced by the very organisation which they served. They were not of course a homogeneous group. There was a social gulf between Irish recruits and the usually Anglo-Irish officers, and often also a religious divide: Catholics predominated among the former while the latter were in some instances exclusively Protestant. But all engaged with and were affected by the discussion of 'Irishness'. Bartlett and Jeffery have suggested that there exists 'an Irish military tradition' which has proved 'a key element in modern Irish identity'.<sup>7</sup> This paper will show how India was not only this tradition's most enduring theatre of action, and a place where 'Irishness' was formulated in an environment highly conscious of race, but also a place where national identity was malleable. More than this, India was a destination where new identities could be acquired.

### Who were the Irish?

India was the great prize of a Gaelic-speaking army recruited by the East India Company exclusively in Ireland under Irish generals.

- C.J. O'Donnell.<sup>8</sup>

When the one-time 'enfant terrible of the ICS' staked this claim he was not only indulging a reputation for pugnacity which some of his colleagues considered typically Irish.<sup>9</sup> He was by 1913 a politician making a claim for Home Rule based on Irish imperial service. O'Donnell did not back up his remarks with hard proof, but with what was evidently a well-established colonial truism that the English paid the Scots to run their Empire for them, and the Irish to fight for it. Memoirs by men such as Sandford or N.W. Bancroft created a myth that India was won by Irish peasant recruits and mercenary adventurers, typically of eccentric habits and incomprehensible accents. Bancroft goes as far as to estimate that three quarters of his unit were Irish.<sup>10</sup> But although his and O'Donnell's claims are exaggerated and, as shall be seen, the myth they evoke served a representative purpose, there was a measure of truth in it. The Company maintained its

<sup>7</sup> Bartlett, T. & Jeffery K. (1996). 'An Irish Military Tradition?' in Bartlett, T. & Jeffery, K. (eds.), *A Military History of Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Bartlett, T. (1997). 'The Irish Soldier in India, 1750-1947' in Holmes, M. & Holmes, D. (eds.), *Ireland and India: Connections, Comparisons, Contrasts*, Folens, Dublin, p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Cook, S.B. (1987). The Irish Raj: Social Origins and Careers of Irishmen in the Indian Civil Service, 1855-1914, *Journal of Social History*, **20:3**, 518.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, p.17; Bancroft, *From Recruit to Staff Sergeant*, p.28.

own recruiting depots in Ireland, and its forces enjoyed a better repute with potential enlistees than the British Army.<sup>11</sup> The pay was greater and unlike the latter, which at least officially barred Roman Catholics, John Company did not seek to make windows in men's souls.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he had a liking for Irishmen. There is evidence to suggest that Irish recruits were physically larger than their British counterparts, and had been thought since the Peninsular campaigns better endowed with the requisite toughness for overseas service.<sup>13</sup> But more importantly, where there was demand there was also supply. The Irish agricultural labourer was paid considerably less than the British, and in times of famine he had two options: a passage to America or the recruiting sergeant.<sup>14</sup> The former cost shillings while the latter would give you one.

As a result, between 1825 and 1850 the Bengal Army drew 47.9% of its European recruits from Ireland. At the outbreak of the 1857 rebellion it is probable that Irishmen, born either in the United Kingdom or in India, comprised over half of the Company's European rank and file.<sup>15</sup> The British Army regiments which assumed their duties had been on average two-fifths Irish from the 1830s to 1840s. But while these numbers steadily declined from the Great Famine onwards, the Irish representation nonetheless remained disproportionately large.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the army contained dedicated Irish regiments, and in every year of the period under consideration at least one was stationed in India.<sup>17</sup>

The men were mostly of rural origin, uneducated and Catholic. Moreover, while the late Victorian army drew its recruits increasingly from the industrial slums, the Irish retained their rural character for longer.<sup>18</sup> In keeping with the Company's reputation for attracting a better class of recruit, the trades of Irishmen serving in the Bengal Artillery in 1859 included: clerk, chandler, carpenter, coach smith, rope maker, stonemason, shoemaker, wheelwright and 'scholar'.<sup>19</sup> But among men who listed their occupations as 'labourer' or 'none', those born in Ireland outnumbered those who were not by 612 to 276. Many also enlisted away from their native places, often in Glasgow or Liverpool, suggesting itinerant labour.<sup>20</sup> Given that Irishmen appear to have arrived in India from lowlier and more rural backgrounds than their British contemporaries, it might be inferred that they had narrower prospects as an economic group, and that the compulsion to join up was felt more strongly by them. Even in 1914, the Cork man John Lucy

<sup>11</sup> Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India', p.15.

<sup>12</sup> Spiers, E.M. (1996). 'Army Organisation and Society in the Nineteenth Century' in Bartlett & Jeffery, *A Military History of Ireland*, p.336.

<sup>13</sup> Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India', p.16; Spiers, 'Army Organisation', pp.336-7.

<sup>14</sup> Karsten, P. (1983). Irish Soldiers in the British Army, 1792-1922: Suborned or Subordinate?, *Journal of Social History*, **17:1**, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Spiers, 'Army Organisation', p.336.

<sup>16</sup> Denman, T. (1996). Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple?, *War in History* **3:3**, 262.

<sup>17</sup> According to various regimental histories. See Appendix for numbered list of Irish regiments.

<sup>18</sup> Spiers, E.M. (1980), *The Army and Society: 1815-1914*, Longman, London, pp.48, 64; Karsten, Suborned or Subordinate?, pp.36-7.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, p.12.

<sup>20</sup> OIOC, L/MIL/10/182 ('1858/9 Alphabetical Annual Long Roll of the Regiment of Bengal Artillery').

explained wryly that the soldier who said 'I listed for me pound', meant not his bounty but his daily ration of bread.<sup>21</sup>

James McConville's summary of his formative years might be taken as representative of many young Belfast men:

unsettled and left school at 12 years old. Went from job to job. Office Boy, Flax Mill, Mineral Water Factory Bottle Washing, etc. always had a hankering for uniform and it was a normal thing for many families to have soldiers, either joining up, serving or coming Home T.X. with their bounties aggregated at £3 per annum<sup>22</sup>

Although barely fifteen, he joined the Royal Irish Rifles in 1899 with the connivance of a dubious recruiting sergeant. Clearly the army was a close companion to working-class Irish life. For all its ubiquity and fanfare, however, enlistment was generally sneered at by anyone with a modicum of social pretension.<sup>23</sup>

This did not, however, prevent men from taking pride in their service. W. Patterson had the usual reason for making the long journey, quite alone, from Limerick to Woolwich as a drummer boy in the Royal Horse Artillery. 'I wanted to get away from the Family to earn my own living, and not to be a burden to my parents, who already had seven children.'<sup>24</sup> But he was also following eagerly in his father's footsteps, in spite of this man's solicitations to find him an apprenticeship in a more upwardly mobile trade. Although it was hardly the free-and-easy existence advertised, the army did offer an escape from the drudgery of a dead-end existence. India, for all its dangers, was a destination, and McConville and Patterson signed up for service there eagerly. For Company soldiers, it was also a place where men might better themselves by seeking administrative appointments.<sup>25</sup> While these opportunities diminished under Crown rule, India remained a place where soldiers could enjoy certain luxuries, such as servants and greater purchasing power, and where they could relish not being at the absolute bottom of the social pile. Even if their hopes proved chimerical, India for these men was at worst a change and potentially a place of aspiration.

### *The Anglo-Irish*

Lacking the brains for the Church or the law, Kendal Coghill's profession was predetermined from his days at Cheltenham School. 'My pugilistic qualifications steered the final decision to the Army – and India.' It was probably family finances in Cork that preordained his destination. 'India was my fate, and to India I went.'<sup>26</sup> Even after the abolition of the purchase system for officers' commissions in 1871, the Indian Army was a more realistic prospect for the younger sons of down-at-heel Protestant gentry. Even

<sup>21</sup> Lucy, J.F. (1938). *There's A Devil in the Drum*, Faber & Faber, London, p.13.

<sup>22</sup> National Army Museum, London (hereafter NAM), 7408-82-1 ('Memories' of James McConville), flyleaf. T.X.= Time-expired. All NAM quotations printed with permission of National Army Museum.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in French, D. (2005). *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c.1870-2000*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.35.

<sup>24</sup> NAM, 7410-195 (Memoir of Lieutenant-Colonel W. Patterson), p.1.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, pp.16-17.

<sup>26</sup> NAM, 7207-4/1 (Mutiny Memoir of Lieutenant. Kendal J.W. Coghill), p.7.

when they could afford to join British regiments, it was typically among high-numbered<sup>27</sup> infantry of the line, with plenty of overseas service, that they found their niche. Frontier postings and imperial flashpoints, however, were a sphere in which they could rise to honour and prominence. The two antagonistic poles of the late Victorian army, Sir Garnet Wolseley and Lord Roberts, were both Anglo-Irishmen who began their careers in India. The latter is the quintessential imperial soldier, his career encapsulated in his title: the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Roberts of Kandahar, Pretoria and Waterford. Born in India to a father in the Company's service, he was even a younger son. For such men, family tradition meant fighting tradition. If enlistees with their thoughts on a pound of bread found there was a 'persistent military flavour to Irish life', then the Anglo-Irish who frequently commanded them had reason to consider themselves a 'military caste'.<sup>28</sup>

### *A Martial Race?*

There was a strong statistical basis, then, for the formation of a persistent stereotype of the 'fighting Irishman'. Just as the Indian Army drew distinctions between various Indian recruitment pools on the basis of ethnic martiality, the British Army was an institution in which the 'races' of the United Kingdom were culturally distinguished. Their ethnicity was defined and nurtured for military ends.<sup>29</sup> The Duke of Cambridge, wary of fostering national sentiments within the forces, had long argued that regiments should observe a 'judicious mixture' of Englishmen, Scotsmen and Irishmen.<sup>30</sup> But he did not perhaps anticipate that the opportunities offered by empire could serve as a unifying force, and that the experience of empire through military service might be instrumental in generating a sense of broader affiliation. While national identities were in fact enshrined in military custom, the overarching structure flattered its countless bricks with an appealing notion of what Kenny has called 'imperial belonging'.<sup>31</sup>

This is particularly pertinent to the Irish because the role they were expected to fulfil was military. The Highland kilt may have captured the Victorian imagination more forcibly, but it was the Irish who were most thoroughly scrutinised by the 'martial race theory' devised in India. Irish graduates were prominent in the Indian Civil and Medical Services, and Ireland furnished India with several viceroys. But the 'archetypal' Irishman abroad in India was a soldier.<sup>32</sup> A martial reputation had long attached to their nation, and been propagated by Irishmen. The intemperate Irish duellist had trod the London stage at the same time as the mercenary 'Wild Geese' trod European battlefields. David Omissi has suggested that the Indian martial race theories promulgated in the latter half of the nineteenth century may have grown out of ideas developed about the Irish and Scots in

<sup>27</sup> That is, low-status. This included most of the Irish regiments. Spiers, 'Army organisation', p.344.

<sup>28</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, 'Irish Military Tradition', p.7.

<sup>29</sup> Enloe, C.H. (1980) *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p.26.

<sup>30</sup> Strachan, H. (1997). *The Politics of the British Army*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.202.

<sup>31</sup> Kenny, K. (2004). 'The Irish in the Empire' in Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.121.

<sup>32</sup> Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India', p.12.

the preceding decades.<sup>33</sup> If this was the case, then like other concepts which found in India both a theoretical formulation and experimental laboratory, these racial ideas were in turn re-applied to their place of derivation. For it was the High Victorian period of frequent imperial warfare and constant recruitment which saw the systematisation of this warlike reputation into received colonial knowledge about the Irish. Like the Sikh, declared Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Celt turns soldier 'for sheer love of fighting'.<sup>34</sup> It was likewise necessary for such unruly warriors to be commanded by English or Anglo-Irish officers. But when 'well led and in a high state of discipline', declared schoolboys' favourite W.H. Fitchett, 'there is no better fighting material in the world than an Irish regiment'.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, like the mainstay of the Indian Army - the Punjabi Jat - the ideal Irish recruit was a sturdy agriculturist, physically hardy and mentally impressionable.<sup>36</sup> These qualities were also attributed to the same 'environmental determinism' which Tan Tai Yong has shown to underpin much Indian martial race theory.<sup>37</sup> As in Punjabi districts like Rohtak where poor rains often left the soil flinty and unworkable, the mundane process whereby impoverished peasants turned redcoat for sustenance conveniently meshed with the official notion that a hard land bred tough men. Moreover, as with the Gurkhas, the perennial and uncorrupted raw material was to be found in those districts least tainted by modernity. The mind's eye of an army officer classically spied its recruit tramping the wild and isolated tracts of Galway, Kerry and Connemara, as in Elizabeth Butler's painting *Listed for the Connaught Rangers*. As the nineteenth century progressed, officers such as the painter's husband, an Irish Catholic Lieutenant-General, bemoaned in his 'Plea for the Peasant' the noticeable supersession of these stout, easily-disciplined men by undernourished and fractious slum-dwellers.<sup>38</sup> But this lamentable reverse might not be guessed at from the representation of fighting Irishmen. Officers wanted to see their men as peasants. Taking their cue from the newspaper cartoons studied by Michael de Nie, they and the public at large tended to see the Irish trooper with especial uniformity as 'a Celt, a Catholic, and a peasant'.<sup>39</sup> Such images proved, among other things, that the Irish were incapable of self-government.<sup>40</sup> It is instructive that at times of rebel outbreak and land agitation these same cartoonists and columnists reached for the dark corners of the Empire for a simile - to India's bloodcurdling 'thugs' on more than one occasion.<sup>41</sup> What this hegemonic knowledge added up to was a means of control over a troublesome dependency that, as the Empire's Achilles' heel, was often contemplated in the global context. Analogies between India and Ireland may have been

<sup>33</sup> Omissi, D. (1994). *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p.24.

<sup>34</sup> O'Dwyer, Sir M. (1925). *India as I Knew It, 1885-1925*, Constable, London, p.415.

<sup>35</sup> Fitchett, W.H. (1897). *Deeds that Won the Empire, Historic Battle Scenes*, London, p.92.

<sup>36</sup> French, *Military Identities*, p.34.

<sup>37</sup> Tan, T.Y. (2005). *The Garrison State: the Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab*, Sage, Delhi, p.72.

<sup>38</sup> Spiers, 'Army Organisation', p.340.

<sup>39</sup> de Nie, M.W. (2004). *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882*, University of Wisconsin Press, London, 2004, p.5.

<sup>40</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, 'Irish Military Tradition', p.18.

<sup>41</sup> de Nie, *Eternal Paddy*, pp.121, 217.



exploited by nationalists of both countries, but they also, as Kaori Nagai has shown, were the focus knobs which brought the great image of empire into unquestionable clarity.<sup>42</sup> The Irishman was marked with the savagery of the 'native', but a thorough knowledge of his ways offered a means of turning those 'pugilistic qualifications' to good use.

### *Regimental Identities*

The institution which aimed to achieve this, by manufacturing an identity for its Irish recruits, was the regiment. Arguably an antiquated formation by the late nineteenth century, it was nonetheless retained in 1874 and 1881 under the major army reforms effected by Edward Cardwell and Hugh Childers. A small unit, it remained suitable for the frequent 'little wars' of empire. But the regiment also served to accommodate Britain's local identities. The reforms tied each to a specific recruiting region associated with its name and history. Ideally the officers too hailed from this region. Such units, it was thought, were steadier in battle and possessed in abundance the *esprit de corps* so prized by defenders of the system.<sup>43</sup>

The Irish, however, were already reputed for an *esprit* of their own. They had always brought a 'culturally different element' to the army, but the late Victorian regiment provided the means to define, foster, preserve and control this element.<sup>44</sup> The combination of previously distinct units into two-battalion outfits meant that officers set out, to borrow Hobsbawm's phrase, to invent the traditions of their regiments. For the Irish units, regimental identity equated to, or rather superseded, national identity. The soldier-turned-academic Sir John Hackett remarked that the purpose of inculcating a notion of regimental difference is to encourage 'a feeling of betterness'.<sup>45</sup> For Irish soldiers this meant competition to be pre-eminent in Irishness. The Royal Irish Regiment may have been the oldest and most prestigious Irish unit, but the Connaught Rangers often considered themselves the most distinctively Celtic.<sup>46</sup> At the same time as recruiters in Punjab, by only enlisting 'true' Sikhs, were encouraging Sikhs in general to distinguish themselves from Hindus by accepting baptism as members of the Khalsa, the culture of the Irish regiment displays the same tendency to protect, nurture, traditionalise and ultimately ossify what it considered 'Irishness'.<sup>47</sup>

Needless to say, this notion of 'Irishness' was founded on well-established and overlapping layers of stereotype. The lyrics of regimental songs celebrate the fighting virtues of the Irish as well as their capacity for drink, adventurous spirit and giddy and eccentric mannerisms.<sup>48</sup> This encouragement of ethnic spirit had political implications. The regimental identity which Irish enlistees adopted was intended not to erase, but to

<sup>42</sup> Nagai, K. (2006). *Empire of Analogies: Kipling, India and Ireland*, Cork University Press, Cork, p.3.

<sup>43</sup> French, *Military Identities*, p.15.

<sup>44</sup> Spiers, 'Army Organisation', p.344.

<sup>45</sup> Hackett, Sir J.W. (1983). *The Profession of Arms*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, pp.223-4.

<sup>46</sup> Jourdain, H.F.N. (1924-8). *The Connaught Rangers*, 3 vols., Royal United Services Institution, London, i, 423.

<sup>47</sup> Fox, R.G. (1985). *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp.141-3.

<sup>48</sup> Jourdain, H.F.N. (1934). *Ranging Memories*, Privately printed by J. Johnson at the University Press, Oxford, p.50.

override anything preceding it. Any nationalism in which they indulged was to be strictly regimental. Irishmen arrived in the army with much local baggage: Catholic, Protestant, rural, urban, Anglophone or Gaelophone. They were not obliged to forget these associations, and an officer might even congratulate a man on his fine Tipperary brogue.<sup>49</sup> But men were expected to settle their differences in the idiom of regimental Irishness – along with some blunter instruments of expression. ‘Many a fight there was’, recalls an Ulster Protestant of his early days with a draft of Galway Catholics, ‘till we began to know one another’. Discipline and unity in India were essential, ‘seeing we are in an enemy’s country’.<sup>50</sup> The process was not fully successful, as when in 1901 St Patrick’s Day fell on a Sunday. James McConville recalls a scene of grudging acceptance in Fort William, Calcutta:

the C of Es paraded at 11am for service under command of Major Jackey Brown ... The Band struck up an ordinary march but Major Brown stopped them and made them play St Patrick’s Day. The Catholics from the verandah were watching the parade and raised a little cheer. But a number of the C of Es would not keep step to the tune. Their orange sentiments gave them to think that St Patrick’s Day was a Popish tune.<sup>51</sup>

However reluctantly, then, Irish behaviour was literally regimented by the British Army, which here plays a very different role socially than the Indian Army did within the communities which supplied its manpower. Punjabi recruitment policies consciously reproduced the social ‘cleavages’ which divided caste and creed in an effort to forestall dreaded ‘combination’ and mutiny.<sup>52</sup> The army was the mirror of what the British fancied to be a polity so utterly fragmented that it could only be held together by their overlordship. But because disaffection or sectarianism could not be tolerated in Irish troops garrisoning the empire, the army itself was their unifying genius.

### *Military Culture and Popular Culture*

The formation of the Irish Guards provides a picture of how a regimental culture could be artificially assembled from scratch.<sup>53</sup> Formed in 1900 as a gesture of reward from Queen Victoria to ‘my brave Irish soldiers’ for their severe losses in South Africa, they were intended as an Irish elite. Only the finest recruits were selected and every officer was Irish. They were also a simulacrum of everything in Irish culture recognisable and pleasing to the Victorian armchair general. ‘Come back to Erin’ was chosen for their slow march, they kept an Irish wolfhound called ‘Brian Boru’, and St Patrick’s Day was celebrated with banqueting, hurley and the presentation of the Royal Shamrock – followed immediately by Mass.<sup>54</sup> The political objective which informed this formula for a national tradition was loyalty. It was intended as an ideological counter to nationalist efforts to recruit Irishmen for the Boer cause.

<sup>49</sup> Wolseley, Sir G.J. (1903). *The Story of a Soldier’s Life*, Westminster, p.119.

<sup>50</sup> NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), pp.3, 23.

<sup>51</sup> NAM, 7408-82-1 (‘Memories’ of James McConville), pp.23-4.

<sup>52</sup> Tan, *The Garrison State*, p.76; Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, p.87.

<sup>53</sup> Verney, P. (1970). *The Micks: the Story of the Irish Guards*, P. Davies, London, pp.4-11.

<sup>54</sup> Verney, *The Micks*, pp.2-11.

But then the Guards' tradition was not invented *ex nihilo*. It was referential. Besides older regiments, by 1900 there was much to draw on from popular culture and public perceptions of the Irish soldier. His image had been developed not just by martial race theorists, but by the relentless sentimentalism of the Victorian age. The process can already be seen in motion in the 1840s. Music covers show sorrowful leavetakings on the shores of Dublin Bay or 'Wild Geese' murmuring 'Savourneen Deelish' in foreign fields 'from Dunkirk to Belgrade', to quote Thomas Davis's contemporary poem.<sup>55</sup> Such images of the lonely, sacrificial soldier culminate exploitatively in Colenso-themed ballads like 'Some Mother will Lose a Son'. A glance at the back cover rewards with a list of other songs from the same London publisher, including 'He'll ne'er forget Ould Ireland', 'What Paddy gave the drum', 'Queen and the Shamrock', 'What do you think of the Irish now?' and two panegyrics on 'Bobs' among other Irish-themed ditties.<sup>56</sup>

The crucial formative period for this phenomenon, however, was the 1850s. The first two wars to receive modern journalistic coverage brought about a radical change in the public image of the soldier. The Crimean campaign saw British troops deployed in Europe for the first time since Waterloo. But it also saw a new kind of imperial public and a change from the scum of the earth recruited for drink, as Wellington dubbed his cannon-fodder, to the gallant and obedient patriot richly deserving the gentle ministrations of 'the Lady with the Lamp'.<sup>57</sup> The public was starting to understand the Empire, and hence it was starting to understand that which underpinned it: the armed forces. There was a fast-growing interest in the life of the individual soldier, a demand for it to be represented. Ireland was always the colonial jigsaw piece that refused to fit. Its politics were complex and misrepresented. Its problems seemed intractable. Hence the British public started to make sense of John Bull's other island through their representatives in the military. In this they followed their sovereign who, perhaps, never really understood her Irish until they laid down their lives for her at Hart's Hill.<sup>58</sup> India was the premier imperial theatre in which the Irish served England in her wars. Hence the second great conflict of the 1850s was instrumental in educating the British public not only about India, but also about the Irish.

### The Irish Soldier in India: Representations

The arrival for the first time in a strange country of so many British troops gave rise to ... many jokes among the civilian population.... Foremost among the heroes of these amusing stories was, of course, the Irish soldier, or 'worthy son of Erin', who is shocked to find in the Indians a race as loquacious as his own. At last in exasperation he addresses the crowded street 'with an unmistakable Hibernian Brogue; "Silence! silence there, boys! Don't have so much *tarlking* wid ye. Bedad! When a man opens his mouth, sure half his strength just pops out of it."'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> 'The Battle Eve of the Irish Brigade'.

<sup>56</sup> NAM, 7603-7 ('Some mother will lose a son'). 'Bobs' was an affectionate nickname for Lord Roberts.

<sup>57</sup> Spiers, *Army and Society*, pp.116-7.

<sup>58</sup> Verney, *The Micks*, p.1.

<sup>59</sup> Kincaid, D. (1938), *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937*, George Routledge, London, pp.187-8.

This account of the disembarkation of reinforcements at Calcutta, published in 1938 in Denis Kincaid's *British Social Life in India*, reveals the longevity of the many depictions of Mutiny-era Irish soldiers. The rebellion involved the many Irishmen of the Bengal and Bombay armies, but also six Irish-dominated regular infantry regiments.<sup>60</sup> 1857 cemented the Irishman's definition as a soldier, rather than as an administrator, doctor or missionary. Moreover, contemporary reporting and later representations of the rebellion see a psychological deepening of so-called Irish traits: drunkenness, cheek, religiosity, an innate comedy and a rapid change from ferocious battle-cries to sentimental tears.

The Irish are shown as not only brave but recklessly brave. Sir Garnet Wolseley recalls the battle-lust of a man who, having just survived an explosion, secreted himself in a *dhoolie* headed for the front. 'His legs still bound in bandages', staggering from his hiding place into battle he declared "as long as Tim O'Brian can put one leg before the other his comrades shall never go into action without him."<sup>61</sup> At Delhi, Sergeant Ryan and Private McGuire won Victoria Crosses for throwing blazing ammunition boxes over the parapet of the Kabul Gate, while one Private McGovern is described capturing a turret single-handed after overhearing an officer remarking that he would be an acceptable loss. The services of such men went beyond the call of duty but also beyond orders. Their courage is intermixed with indiscipline. McGovern appears to have been an emblem of Irish vice as well as virtue. As the regimental historian comments regretfully, 'his reckless, dare-devil acts [were] the talk of the Army; and had he been as abstemious as he was brave, he would have been of sterling worth'.<sup>62</sup>

The 53<sup>rd</sup> Foot seem to have enjoyed a particular reputation for courage and rambunctiousness. Suspecting that the Scottish commander Sir Colin Campbell was as usual about to deploy his beloved Highlanders in the van, they performed an impromptu charge near Fategarh. The 'son of Erin' Lord Gough looked on with amusement. 'Little did these wild Irishmen care', when berated by Campbell for their blatant insubordination. 'They had had their fight, and a real good one, so far as they were concerned; and as Sir Colin concluded his speech of rebuke they gave him three cheers.'<sup>63</sup> Audacity with a wink, and an ardour for battle, secured his forgiveness. Probably exaggerated, such stories and stereotypes nevertheless persist.<sup>64</sup> Although he did not visit India until 1862, Sir George Trevelyan mockingly described how Delhi was won by

a comic Irish sergeant who appeared to have emancipated himself from all discipline and – perhaps with unmerited distrust of the power of the regulation rifle – went into action armed with a shillelagh. Among other feats, he danced the jig without hat or bonnet under the mid-day Indian sun.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> The 75<sup>th</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 86<sup>th</sup>, 88<sup>th</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Foot. Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India,' p.19.

<sup>61</sup> Wolseley, *Soldier's Life*, pp. 275-6.

<sup>62</sup> Innes, P.R. (1885). *The History of the Bengal European Regiment, now the Royal Munster Fusiliers, and how it Helped to Win India*, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., London, pp.477-500.

<sup>63</sup> Gough, Sir H. (1897). *Old Memories*, Edinburgh, pp.192-5.

<sup>64</sup> For instance, Roberts's narration of this event has it that the 53<sup>rd</sup> Foot was egged on by Sir William Mansfield and Major Payn. Roberts, Lord F.S. (1897). *Forty-one Years in India: from Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, 2 vols., Bentley, London, i, 383-4.

<sup>65</sup> Trevelyan, Sir G.O. (1864). *The Competition Wallah*, Macmillan, London, p.45.

Such was their ubiquity, the Irish war correspondent W.H. Russell does not need to inform his reader that the manic apparition who rushed at him through the gunsmoke at the Kaiserbagh Palace in Lucknow was Irish. It seems in keeping with a Mutiny narrative that the looter, 'drunk with plunder', should address him in a comic brogue: 'Holy mother of Moses, what will you give me for this iligant shtring of imeralds and jewls?'<sup>66</sup>

*The Irish Regiment: Virtues and Vices*

These representations should be seen in the context of the institutions that moulded the Irish soldier: the regiments. The rebellion and administrative shake-up that followed produced two-side effects which deepened the association of most Irish regiments to India. For units like the Connaught Rangers, which did not return to Europe until the 1870s, South Asia became a second home. For four other Irish regiments, an Indian tradition of service came as an inheritance. In Childers's 1881 reforms, six of the nine European outfits of the Company armies were yoked into two-battalion Irish units.<sup>67</sup> Although the official reasoning is uncertain, the amalgamations made perfect sense to the Inniskillings' historical committee, for whom the Madras Infantry was 'Irish in all but name'.<sup>68</sup> The transfer of the Europeans over to the British Army at the conclusion of EIC rule had rendered the former even more Irish-heavy, since proportionately fewer Irish troops chose to accept a free discharge. Probably they faced dimmer prospects back home than their British counterparts.<sup>69</sup> Any inconsistencies in amalgamation were papered over by the new wave of regimental histories. One heralds the Munster Fusiliers as 'the Inheritors and Trusted Guardians' of the Bengal Europeans' proud traditions.<sup>70</sup> If the Company units were seen as characterised by the presence of an Irish culture, it was appropriate that their descendant regiments should be among the chief vehicles of Irish martial identity.

As British soldiers saw more and more of their overseas service in Asia, India assumed a central place in regimental culture. The army - until 1914, of course - no longer fought great battles in Europe. Fighting for England meant fighting for the Empire. Chillianwalla, Kandahar, Colenso, Ladysmith, Sind, Punjab, Mutiny, Nepal, three times each Afghanistan and Burma: these were the names now embroidered on regimental colours. The 'fighting Irishman' crops up everywhere. The martial approbation he received within the army was echoed in such consumable militarism as W.J. Elliott's contribution to 'The Deeds of Daring Library'. In this catalogue of Victoria Cross winners in Afghanistan, Elliott concludes his account of Major O'Moore Creagh's exploits with a racial compliment:

<sup>66</sup> Russell, Sir W.H. (1860). *My Diary in India, in the year 1858-9*, Routledge, Warne and Routledge, London, p.334.

<sup>67</sup> See Appendix for full details.

<sup>68</sup> (1934). *The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers: being the history of the regiment from December 1688 to July 1914*, Constable, London, p.357 (compiled under the direction of a regimental historical records committee).

<sup>69</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, p.160.

<sup>70</sup> Innes, *Bengal European Regiment*, flyleaf.

From his name, I imagine he is an Irishman. I hope he is; for, quick-tempered and impulsive as these men are, they are nevertheless warm-hearted and brave. They have always provided Great Britain with the best of soldiers, and have helped to win many a brilliant victory for the country to which they owe their allegiance.<sup>71</sup>

There was even a Maxim gun detachment from the Royal Irish Rifles on the 1903-4 Younghusband expedition to Tibet.<sup>72</sup> The fifty years after the rebellion saw the image of the Irishman as soldier, with his attendant characteristics, become hegemonic. Moreover, the image becomes increasingly inflected with the martial race discourse which as the century progressed became such common currency for Indian officers. It is particularly significant when men like Wolseley, Roberts, White or Kitchener apply this language to Irish soldiers, because not only are they drawing on a theoretical framework of which they (especially Roberts) were the chief architects, but because they may also be recalling perceptions acquired through their own Irish background.<sup>73</sup> Roberts himself had the pleasure of discovering, upon enquiry, that a solitary attacker he observed charging up a precipitous Afghan mountainside ‘apparently utterly regardless of the shower of bullets falling around him’, was an Irish private whom he claims was later awarded the Victoria Cross.<sup>74</sup>

If popular media supplied the British and Irish public with images of the gallant Gael, the Indian military legacy was impressed on the men themselves through their regimental culture. The Connaught Rangers celebrated the anniversaries of their Indian victories, tended the graves of comrades laid in Indian soil, and left behind them a memorial at Kanpur and an altar at Rawalpindi.<sup>75</sup> But the most potent symbols of regimental association with India were the great military displays which accompanied the imperial Durbars of 1877, 1903 and 1911, and the 1885 Rawalpindi Durbar at which the ferocious efficiency of the huge British war machine was impressed upon the newly-installed Emir of Afghanistan. A young upcountry reporter named Rudyard Kipling observed with approval the synchronised manoeuvres of units representing the army’s multiple ethnicities, both Indian and European. Always fascinated by Paddy Atkins, it is characteristic that his analogy should dwell first upon the Royal Irish Fusiliers:

Dublin and the Deccan, Paisley and the Punjab, Nepal and Lancashire, one might continue the antitheses indefinitely, have all contributed to the crop of armed men ready for war.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Elliott, W.J. (1882). *The Victoria Cross in Afghanistan and on the frontiers of India during the years 1877, 1878, 1879 & 1880 : how it was won*, Dean & Son, London, p.61.

<sup>72</sup> NAM, 6810-65-69 (Photograph of maxim gun set of Royal Irish Rifles, attached to Royal Fusiliers, Tibet 1903-4).

<sup>73</sup> N.B. Although Kitchener has sometimes been called Anglo-Irish this is not strictly the case. He was born on his father’s recently-purchased Kerry estate but the family did not have a significant prior history in Ireland.

<sup>74</sup> Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India*, ii, 405. In fact Roberts in his enthusiasm was mistaken. Seven out of sixteen Victoria Crosses during the Second Afghan War were awarded to Irishmen, but a MacMahon was not among them. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/victoriacross.asp>

<sup>75</sup> Jourdain, *Connaught Rangers*, i, 423, 426, 211, 425.

<sup>76</sup> Pinney, T. (ed., 1986). *Kipling’s India: uncollected sketches, 1884-88*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p.101.

At the 1911 Delhi Durbar the Irish were not merely one part of a well-oiled machine: they were the star attraction. The Connaught Rangers furnished a guard of honour for George V in Chandni Chowk, and their drums were given pride of place on parade. The King expressed his gratitude by investing them with new colours, after their formal anointing with Holy Water by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Agra. It was of course Britain to which the King was referring when he explained to the ranks that a colour is 'the outward sign of your allegiance to God, Your Sovereign, and country'. At the officers' reception, however, a Gaelic note was struck by Sir O'Moore Creagh of Afghanistan fame, now the Indian Commander-in-Chief. Misquoting Davis's 'Irish Brigade', he proposed a toast to the Rangers:

I believe I am the oldest Irish soldier at present serving on full pay. I am, moreover, a Clare man myself and have also family connections with this distinguished Regiment.... The Connaught Rangers of to-day are ever ready and eager to emulate the deeds of their gallant forefathers, who left their bones with honour on every battlefield in Europe, from Paris to Belgrade.<sup>77</sup>

These grandiose displays of power were in their way the most masterful of representations, symbolically enacting with military precision the sacred fictions of empire. The role of the Irish in them, as in India as a whole, was ambiguous. It was a place where they, a colonised population, were charged with keeping down another, and in this they occupied not a hypocritical position but an intermediary one. The colonial power needed them to embody the superior qualities of British troops and British character. One martial race meets another in Sir George MacMunn's account of an engagement during the 1888 Black Mountain Expedition. But what sets the Royal Irish Regiment apart is training:

The bulk of the attack fell on the 18<sup>th</sup> who, steady as a rock, stood up in line to the rush ... of the fierce, grim, fanatical faces with skull cap on top, and long blades in the hands. But discipline was too much for wild hate.<sup>78</sup>

However, the Irish trooper also needed to be reminded that he was not quite, to use that figurative as well as literal Victorian phrase, a 'white man'. This was not just a question of Irishness, but also of class. It was important that years of bossing Indian servants should not be allowed to turn the heads of mere rankers. In the British caste system, Tommy Atkins was very low down the pecking order. Any new-found affection for the brave young soldier was tempered by the old contempt, and there was particular cause for this in India. The drunkenness, lechery and disorder of the other ranks were an embarrassment to the master race.<sup>79</sup>

But if soldiers were chided for such offences, they still had to be represented as committing them. Such failures of character confirmed their subordinate status. Their degraded behaviour, in need of officership, demonstrated the wisdom of a rigid social

<sup>77</sup> Jourdain, *Connaught Rangers*, i, 417-23

<sup>78</sup> MacMunn, Sir G.F. (1933). *The Martial Races of India*, Low, Marston & Co., London, p.227.

<sup>79</sup> Ballhatchet, K. (1980). *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: imperial attitudes and policies and their critics, 1793-1905*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, pp.66, 162.

order which persisted in India long after it had begun to decay in England. But for the Irishman in India, such backsliding tendencies represented the wisdom of colonial rule, and his incapacity for self-government. Among the low, he well may have been the lowest, his inferiority obvious even in the eyes of Indians, who identified the 'Rishti' separately from the 'Angrese'.<sup>80</sup> Even officers' characters may not have been untouched by this slur. In a rare surviving memoir of an Indian sepoy, the author Sita Ram expresses approval of 'true English *sahibs*, not *sahibs* from the hilly island'.<sup>81</sup> In 1831 the young Mary Fitzgibbon braved her father's fury and wedded a 'poor soldier' at Bangalore. The fact that she states very plainly and proudly his Clonmel roots, and that only one Mrs McGregor broke the social boycott imposed upon her, suggests that his origins made her choice all the more offensive.<sup>82</sup>

The faults which undermined British superiority included drunkenness, debauchery, ignorance, overt and violent racism, criminality, mendacity, as well as traits which deflated their overblown manliness, such as 'femininity,' sentimentality or, more darkly, the personal weakness that led to desertion or suicide. Such mortal frailties almost certainly ran through the rank and file as a whole, but are attributed particularly to the Irish. As well as having a reputation for thieving, the 'Connaught Footpads' may also have been especially notorious for applying the fist and boot to disrespectful 'natives'.<sup>83</sup> A riot nearly ensued when, according to Frank Richards in his salacious memoir *Old Soldier Sahib*, a bazaar seller decided to quote to some Rangers Lord Curzon's injunctions against the ill-treatment of their Aryan brothers.<sup>84</sup> But if this behaviour truly was characteristic of the regiment, it was not confined to its Irishmen. Corporal Fred Williams regaled his sister in England with the Ranger's pastimes at Ferozepore:

We say to any native-toff 'Come here you SUAR' (thats pig) and if he does not come we murder him. One of our fellows killed one, kicked him to death and he only got fined 100 Rupees. We have to do that or they would quick do us in they tried to kill the Viceroy last Tuesday.<sup>85</sup>

### *The Uses of Stereotype*

True or not, these stereotypes served a representative purpose. The Irish were the obverse side of the two-dimensional British colonial character. Envisaging an imperial conscription society, the architect of army reform Hugh Childers told his constituents 'I wish to see the people of England in the best sense military, but not warlike'.<sup>86</sup> But, while they may have kept it to themselves, the British public in fact loved their 'little wars'

<sup>80</sup> Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India,' p.22; Kevin Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire', p.106.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Mason, P. (1974). *A Matter of Honour: an account of the Indian Army, its officers and men*, Cape, London, pp.207-9.

<sup>82</sup> OIOC, Mss.Eur.B.205/1 (Diary of Mary Fitzgibbon), pp.1-7.

<sup>83</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, 'Irish Military Tradition', p.15.

<sup>84</sup> Richards, F. (1936). *Old Soldier Sahib*, Faber & Faber, London, 1936), pp.142-3.

<sup>85</sup> Imperial War Museum, (hereafter IWM), 80/23/1 (Letters of Corporal Fred Williams), 26 Dec 1912, pp.3-4. Every effort has been made to seek permission for this quotation but the copyright holder could not be found.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in French, *Military Identities*, p.26.



exquisitely.<sup>87</sup> Fortunately they could defer the messier side-effects of noble conquest onto the 'warlike' Irish. In India, where the warrior's vanity came more to the forefront of the British personality, they remained a useful hook on which to hang the personal defects and weaknesses which underlay that immovable visage. Brave they may be, but from beneath the war-paint could emerge a ridiculous, unmanned childishness. 'Fine men', remarked the Derry-born Sir George White of the Munster Fusiliers, 'but sadly naughty boys'.<sup>88</sup> Therefore the Irish are often represented as having a dual or Protean character, always unpredictable but always ready to play a new role and assume a new form, 'everything by turns, and nothing long'.<sup>89</sup>

Their supposed defects were, of course, often the same that dogged Indians. O'Dwyer, once a district magistrate, wrote that only an Irish peasant can outdo a Punjabi in lies and evasion.<sup>90</sup> This analogy means that the men who govern or officer them have to possess an understanding or affinity with them, a 'native touch'. They have to mix their white with a little black. An Indian Army memo instructed officers who wished to accrue all-important 'personal influence' with their Sikhs or Gurkhas to acquaint themselves with their 'customs and prejudices'.<sup>91</sup> Likewise a good officer of Dubs or Munsters should 'know his Irish to the ground' to paraphrase a remark in Kipling's correspondence, for 'they have to handled on imaginative lines'.<sup>92</sup> The men to accomplish this, in Sir Garnet Wolseley's view, had to be at least part Irish themselves. After a blatant cheeking shown him by some Tipperary striplings during his 'griffin' days in Burma, the young officer was struck by the discipline meted out by his superior, 'an old and amusing Irishman'. Instead of reading them the Articles of War, Colonel Grattan, Royal Irish, chose to throw his desk out of the way, rush at the guilty men and literally kick them out of his office, calling them 'limbs of Satan'. 'As I think of the whole scene', Wolseley comments, 'I feel all the more how necessary it is that Irish soldiers should have Irish officers over them, who understand their curiously Eastern character'.<sup>93</sup>

The Irish military identity also, in this respect, represented an object of desire for the imperial consciousness. Matthew Arnold described Celtic literary sentiment and effusion as a kind of safety-valve for buttoned-down English culture. Despite its evident inferiority, 'it is a temperament for which one has a kind of sympathy notwithstanding.... one feels ... magnetised and exhilarated by it'.<sup>94</sup> It was challenging and bewildering, but as Kipling attempts in his description of a fictional regiment in India, the race that 'fight like fiends, argue like children, reason like women' and 'obey like men', could be comprehended through the military.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Paris, M. (2000). *Warrior Nation: images of war in British popular culture, 1850-2000*, Reaktion, London, p.17.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India', p.22.

<sup>89</sup> Bancroft, *From Recruit to Staff Sergeant*, p.29.

<sup>90</sup> O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew It*, p.45.

<sup>91</sup> NAM, 7209-37/4 (Documents of H. le M. Fellowes), p.1.

<sup>92</sup> Pinney, T. (ed., 1990-2004). *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 6 vols., Macmillan, London, iv, 345 (to Dunsterville, 12 November 1915); iv, 342 (to Stanley Baldwin, 23 October 1915).

<sup>93</sup> Wolseley, *Soldier's Life*, pp.33-5.

<sup>94</sup> Arnold, M. (1867). *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Smith, Elder, London, p.109.

<sup>95</sup> Kipling, R., 'The Mutiny of the Mavericks' in (2005) *Collected Short Stories*, 5 vols., Folio Society, London, ii, 385-6.

Within the army, the idiom of Irishness could be one of social flexibility, a lubricant in men-officer relations. There is evidence that Irish regimental *esprit de corps* created a less rigid code of conduct and narrowed the social division between officers and men.<sup>96</sup> Certainly the Irishman who could pull off audacity with characteristic humour, enjoyed a certain leeway with indulgent officers. In some respects this was the legacy of EIC India, where an improbable explanation told in an irresistible (and possible exaggerated) brogue could, according to one nostalgic memoir, excuse a drunkard four days absence without leave.<sup>97</sup> Irishmen were emblematic of the old Company army and the rough and ready days when racial distinction and Club-consciousness were only beginning to circumscribe an Englishman's ambit of opportunity in the Subcontinent. They represented the strange age and manners of 'the men who won India'. Swashbuckling eighteenth-century figures such as George Thomas, 'the Raja from Tipperary', exerted a fascination for the colonial imagination. In 1880 the *Calcutta Review* published an article on the life of Thomas, a Navy deserter who entered princely service, carved out a petty kingdom in Haryana, but died in poverty:

Here was a vagrant ... who, in the dominions of the his native sovereign, would have sat in the stocks, or been glad to earn an occasional half-crown, but bearing rule in the land of the Mahratta, and contemplating a conquest from which Alexander had shrunk.<sup>98</sup>

For the most masterful of imperial fabulists, such Irish rovers served as compelling liminal figures in the Indian social landscape. Stereotypes are frequently self-contradicting, and the composite mofussilite Irishman is no exception. In spite of his alleged racism, the Irish Catholic recruit, whether speechifying in Calcutta bazaars or lounging on a barbarian throne, is thought to possess a sort of racial understanding with the Indian native. Representationally, he slips between interstices of a cultural fabric impenetrable to the thoroughbred Englishman. Kipling makes his favourite character, Private Mulvaney, appear at home in India. Not only can he successfully impersonate Krishna while singing an Irish music-hall number but, finding Europe uncongenial at the expiration of his service, he returns to India as a railway foreman.<sup>99</sup> It is, moreover, Irishmen that Kipling makes use of when wanting to push his characters beyond the fascinating verge, into amalgamation with the 'native'. Namgay Doola is a relic of Clive's era, the descendant of an Irish soldier-of-fortune still cleaning his EIC musket in a Himalayan valley. Carnehan, Dravot, McIntosh Jellaludin and Kim's father,

<sup>96</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, 'Irish Military Tradition', p.15.

<sup>97</sup> Sylvester, J.H. (1971). *Cavalry Surgeon: the recollection of Deputy Surgeon-General John Henry Sylvester, Bombay Army*, Macmillan, London, p.41. See also Robert Blatchford's description of how EIC eccentricities die hard with the 'Ramchunders', in *My Life in the Army* (London, 1915), pp.39-45.

<sup>98</sup> British Library Newspapers (hereafter BLN), MC 1101 NPL (*The Pioneer Mail and Indian Weekly News*), 29 April 1880, p.3.

<sup>99</sup> Kipling, 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney', *Collected Short Stories*, ii, 268-9; 'The Big Drunk Draf', *Collected Short Stories*, i, 238. Some soldiers did remain in India, and the example of the Irishmen who chose to stay in the army after 1859 rather than face poor prospects back home suggests that their countrymen may have made up a large proportion of these 'domiciled Europeans.' See Richards's description of a crusted camp-follower, the 'Bacon-wallah' in *Old Soldier Sahib*, pp.83-7; or Bancroft's of 'Byrne, the Irish poet' in *From Recruit to Staff Sergeant*, p.35.

meanwhile, are all members of the despised population of European 'loafers'.<sup>100</sup> Legislated against, these itinerant vagrants were nonetheless pursued by writers with almost anthropological interest, and typically represented as Irish ex-soldiers.<sup>101</sup> Although he elsewhere recalls a real loafer who was English, the police memoirist A.T. Crawford describes his archetypal white tramp as obviously Irish.<sup>102</sup> Bearing a shillelagh and perpetually drunk, the man appears to have stepped out of a *Punch* cartoon on Home Rule.

Crawford, with surprising indulgence, remembers his loafers as exemplars of the brawny manhood that won India. It is just that like Thomas, 'a foiled, circuitous wanderer' or Mulvaney, a 'grizzled, tender, and very wise Ulysses', they have somehow lost their way.<sup>103</sup> The essential characteristic of the Irish soldier, then, is that he is a wanderer. Everywhere at home, but always homeless, he is the ultimate creature of empire, the riddle and its answer. The Scotsman John Pindar, en route to Calcutta in 1859, recalls being imaginatively nourished by the extraordinary blarney of an old soldier:

I've been the hero of moving an' romantic adventure;... I've trodden the pine-covered hills of the Punjaub, an' lived for years under the hoary head of the heaven-kissing Himalayas; I've swam in the yellow Ganges, an' reposed amongst royal groves on the banks of the rapid-rolling Indus;... yea, I've even pressed to my bosom the lovely flowers from the Cashmere hills, an' yet Paddy McCann is no poet.

With this modest admission, the veteran sings another man's lyrics, 'Forget not your Kathleen', to express his sentiments towards his native land.<sup>104</sup> It is impossible to say of course whether Pindar is embroidering a genuine personality with the traits of fictional characters or, even more fascinatingly, whether the real McCann was fashioning his personality from a reading of Orientalist romance.

### *The Black Irish*

Denman has remarked that the Irish soldier never developed a cult like that of the Highlander. But in the Subcontinent he certainly attained a larger-than-life status.<sup>105</sup> Because of the representative purposes which he served, in India the idea of the Irish soldier persisted long after his actual numbers declined. An icon perhaps for the working-class ranks as a whole, he was the public face of the army, regarded by turns with adoration and contempt. He stood for the Empire, and was a stand-in for Britain's warmongering spirit. Denman is right, therefore, to stress the many faces of the Irishman,

<sup>100</sup> In the stories 'Namgay Doola', 'The Man who Would be King', 'To be Filed for Reference' and the novel *Kim*, respectively.

<sup>101</sup> See Arnold, D. (1979). European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 7:2, 104-27.

<sup>102</sup> Arthur, T.C. (pseudonym, 1894). *Reminiscences of an Indian Police Official*, S. Low, London, pp.229-237.

<sup>103</sup> Kipling, 'Private Learoyd's Story', *Collected Short Stories*, i, 231.

<sup>104</sup> Pindar, J. (1877). *Autobiography of a Private Solider*, Cupar, Fife, pp.11-13.

<sup>105</sup> Denman, 'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple?', p.254.

for he was both ‘sentimentalised, patronised, abused, and feared’.<sup>106</sup> Fear emerges in the paranoid accusation and vehement denial of conspiracy. Officers considered it wise to keep an eye out for seditious Catholic chaplains, while Kipling found it necessary to ridicule Dhulip Singh’s plot to suborn the Irish regiments.<sup>107</sup> By recruiting what one officer dubbed ‘turbulent spirits’, Peers has suggested that Indian colonial armies ‘acted as a sponge, siphoning off possible opponents.’<sup>108</sup> Likewise the British Army was a force which not only enforced but instilled loyalism in Ireland, but it did so by representational as well as material means. In an era of increasing politicisation for both India and Ireland, the promotion of Irish images of loyalty became paramount, and the military was a locus for such reassuring emblems.

It is striking that an Anglo-Irish Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, compared the nascent Congress to Irish Home Rulers in their ‘Celtic perverseness’. It betrays the anxiety that nationalists of each country would observe the analogies of government and racial perception linking them, and combine. Heather Streets has argued that the loyal Highlanders were deployed as an ideological counter to their troublesome Celtic brethren. But the army already possessed archetypes – or stereotypes – of good Irishmen.<sup>109</sup> Just as Victorian newspapers frequently assured their readers that land agitation was out of sympathy with the ‘true Irishman’, Kipling’s Mulvaney drew a firm line between the Tommy and the Fenian:

Now there are Oirish an’ Oirish. The good are good as the best, but the bad are wurse than the wurst ... Those are the Black Oirish, an’ ’tis they that bring dishgrace upon the name av Oireland, an’ thim I wud kill.<sup>110</sup>

Ballads, although they have often been used as an example of subaltern opinion, can also be a means of manufacturing public opinion, of compelling citizens to sing the state’s tune. Two contemporary ballads from the Mutiny era delineate the good Irish and the bad. In ‘The Irish Sepoys’ a Protestant loyalist voice compares Catholic Ribbonmen to Indian mutineers. The ‘Victory gained at Lucknow’, meanwhile, literally puts words into the mouths of returning heroes ‘that to England belong’ – even though they are returning to Ireland.<sup>111</sup>

But to turn to their own words and thoughts, how did the Irish represent themselves? Did they speak and act as they were urged, or did they articulate their own language?

### The Irish Soldier in India: Self-Perceptions

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p.273.

<sup>107</sup> Melvin, P. (1986). Some Irish Soldiers in India, *The Irish Sword* (Note), **16:64**, 225; Nagai, *Empire of Analogies*, p.21.

<sup>108</sup> Peers, D.M. (2006). *India under Colonial Rule 1700-1885*, Pearson Education, Harlow, p.39.

<sup>109</sup> Streets, H. (2004). *Martial Races: the Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp.161, 167, 172.

<sup>110</sup> De Nie, *Eternal Paddy*, p.147; Kipling, ‘Black Jack’, *Collected Short Stories*, i, 282-3.

<sup>111</sup> National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Crawford.EB.3720 (‘A New Song called the Irish Sepoys’, Belfast, 1859); Crawford.EB.1503 (‘A New Song: Called the Victory Gained at Lucknow’, Belfast, 1857?). With permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Marched to Kandahar – went thro’ the city in martial array.<sup>112</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> we marched into Candahar, all the troops congregating just outside the city and marching through the fortalice before encamping – a kind of triumphal march.<sup>113</sup>

The Doctor, Abbott and I rode through it and were miserably disappointed, a sink of abomination.<sup>114</sup>

Three Georges who entered Kandahar in January 1879 demonstrate how very distinct individuals can draw commonly, in their reactions to a remote imperial posting, upon a well-established homogenising discourse. For Private George Keating, a Dubliner of the Rifle Corps and proud servant of both Erin and the Queen, the thrill of entering the city is matched only by his second arrival at the conclusion of Roberts’s legendary march from Kabul. The homesick apothecary George Murphy views the display with a wearier eye. Anxious to return to India ‘by hook or crook’, he moans incessantly of being ‘heart broken at the Cabully miles, which are astonishing ones, beating the old Irish ones hollow!’ He strikes a roguishly Irish posture, boasting of how he shared out his aches and pains among his native servants by bestowing ‘many a hearty kick and cuff ... (am I not a cruel man!)’.<sup>115</sup> By contrast, Lieutenant-Colonel George Hennessy, an India-born *ma-bap* solicitous for his men’s well-being, is anxious to stick to his post (if only his gout would let him). Although he remains aristocratically distant from proceedings, after a year of astonishing tedium at Kandahar he is pleased to note a touch of Gaelic amusement. ‘A great game of football today. The Irish against the world, in which the former were victorious.’<sup>116</sup>

What the men share, besides their variously inflected Irishness, is a sense of imperial duty (tempered, for Murphy, with profit). Contrary to what a nationalist historian might hope to find, it is a sense common among Irish soldiers. It did not necessarily, as the army protests of 1858-9 demonstrate, take much to turn the loyalties of experienced soldiers. The ‘White Mutiny’, in which the Company’s Europeans demanded their rightful bounty upon re-enlistment into the Crown forces, was the largest expression of discontent in British military history. It is tempting to perceive between the many lines of interviews, depositions and intercepted letters the shape of Irish protest or of Irish villainisation. It may be that their experience as colonial subjects stoked these men’s discontent. John Devlin was sentenced to fifty lashes for allegedly declaring in barracks ‘they may go and \_\_\_\_ the Queen we will have our rights in spite of them’.<sup>117</sup> Certainly these men sustained fragile livings in Ireland and could not have smiled at the conclusion of a service through which they may have hoped to socially better themselves.

It may be that just as all Company reminiscences seem to star the inevitable Irishman, the exemplary voice of dissent is invariably Irish. The ironically named Surgeon Ireland recalls a reassigned officer being abused with the cry of ‘sind him back to his ould

<sup>112</sup> NAM, 7609-55/1 (Afghan Diary of G.A. Keating), p.12, 8 Jan 1879.

<sup>113</sup> NAM, 6608-39 (Letters of G.W. Murphy to Mary Francis Bean), p.4, 10 Jan 1879.

<sup>114</sup> NAM, 7510-40 (Diary of G. R. Hennessy), p.31, 27 Jan 1879.

<sup>115</sup> NAM, 6608-39 (Letters of G.W. Murphy to Mary Francis Bean), pp.3-4, 10 Jan 1879.

<sup>116</sup> NAM, 7510-40 (Diary of G. R. Hennessy), p.205, 21 Jan 1880.

<sup>117</sup> British Library Manuscripts Department, Add.Ms.42812 (letter book of Sir Hugh Rose), pp.223-6, Proceedings of a General Court Martial performed at Mhow, 6 June 1859.

mutinous Saypoy Rigiment'. A railway engineer complained to his mother of the indiscipline of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bengal Europeans: 'but what can one expect from raw Irish recruits & such officers!' However, the White Mutiny was clearly not a cause which united all Irishmen. The Cork man John Lallas and John Stewart of Monaghan both gave their occupation as 'labourer' when they enlisted in 1853. After six years, the latter had risen to the rank of Lance-Sergeant but the former had remained a Private. Loud cheers emanating from the barrack-rooms at Morar on the morning of 8 May presaged trouble, and when Stewart paid a visit on Number 1 Company he was confronted by Lallas telling him 'be off; you have no business here'. A punch was thrown, but the malcontent was escorted to the quarter guard.<sup>118</sup>

### *Imperial Identity*

The evidence suggests that, at least in the nineteenth century, imperial destiny bound Irish soldiers together more cohesively as an ideology than national resistance, partly because it was, through army culture, more successfully yoked to their racial identity. One purpose, after all, of the manufactured identity was to forestall this opposition spirit. Two valuable late nineteenth century sources demonstrate the fallacy of automatically regarding Irishmen as subaltern voices. George Keating's papers from the Second Afghan War contain not only a diary but also many poems and sketches, from which a suggestive picture of his origins, views and aspirations may be constructed. The 1911 speech of an anonymous Antrim man of the Royal Irish Fusiliers is unusual in that it is written to be performed. Reminiscing on an Indian service roughly contemporary with Keating's, it is delivered in a distinctly loyalist tone at a time of intense political division. As members of a literate minority in the ranks (the fusilier's comrades thought him 'a prodigy of learning'), these men may be unrepresentative of the mass of recruits.<sup>119</sup> However, they nonetheless demonstrate how barrack-room 'scholars', considered dangerous firebrands during the White Mutiny, can instead in the 1880s become the articulators and applauders of an invented tradition.

The two men, one Dublin and the other Belfast, are enthusiastically loyal. Among Keating's papers is a newspaper cutting, also copied by hand, containing a poem condemning the 1882 Phoenix Park Murders,<sup>120</sup> the assassinations which made his contemporary O'Dwyer feel 'ashamed of being an Irishman'.<sup>121</sup> Recalling the same period, the old fusilier gives his audience a taste of marching across Punjab while singing the praises of Irish regiments:

Eighty-eighth & Inniskillen'  
Boys that's able, boys that's willin'  
Faugh-a-Ballagh & Co Down

<sup>118</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, pp.88, 197, 192-3.

<sup>119</sup> NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), p.3.

<sup>120</sup> NAM, 7609-55/2 (Papers of G.A. Keating), 'In Memoriam of Lord Cavendish and Mr Burke'.

<sup>121</sup> O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew It*, p.7.

Stand by the Harp, Stand by the Crown.<sup>122</sup>

Like W. Patterson, who was bitterly disappointed not to meet the King after failing to reach the top three in the boys' running race at Delhi in 1911, this man also enthusiastically participated in a military Durbar. While Kipling watched the manoeuvres from on high in 1885, he was doing extra duty as the regiment's telegraph operator, and spent his free time wondering at the lamentable discipline of the Emir's bodyguard.<sup>123</sup>

Keating, moreover, participates in the process by which military culture absorbs and co-opts rebel rhetoric. In the same way that the Queen's desire in 1900 that her Irish wear the shamrock on St Patrick's Day transformed what had once been considered a seditious symbol into an ornament of uniform, the Irish military identity is capable of singing rebel ballads of the '98 while charging into battle against Pathans and Afridis. Awaiting a major engagement at Kandahar, he uses Thomas Moore's 'Song of the Battle Eve' to evoke his sensations, a poem which ends 'then for Erin and her Cause, boy, hurra! hurra! hurra!'<sup>124</sup> This phenomenon is integral to the 'fictive unity' which Kipling engineers for the Empire, one so persuasive that it is capable of incorporating even its rebel subjects.<sup>125</sup> His fictional Black Tyrone bristles with Fenians, and yet fights for 'the Widdy better than most, bein contrairy-Oirish'.<sup>126</sup> Despite the evident contradiction, Irish soldiers may well have conformed to such hegemonic representation, not merely because it was inculcated in or expected of them, but because it made sense to them. Military culture was capable of reconciling apparent contradictions, and possessed a power that could even be extended to the public sphere when regiments marched out of Irish cities to rapturous applause and the tune of 'A Nation Once Again'. Henry Jourdain, an Irish officer of the Connaught Rangers, recalls a tipsy Boer War evening spent with his comrades singing 'The Wearing of the Green' in a hotel bar. This was intended patriotically, not mockingly, but it was the patriotism of a staunch loyalist on imperial service. A radical South African politician who, overhearing, remarked 'ha, ha, then I am not the only rebel here', either mistook their meaning or understood it all too well.<sup>127</sup>

Lastly, Keating and the old fusilier are complicit, or even collaborate, in the stereotypical portrayal of Irishmen. Their martial status is heartily reinforced. 'I daresay you would like an opinion as to the qualities of our countrymen as soldiers', the latter tells his audience. The old soldier says he can do no better than quote Lieutenant Shipp's famous appraisal of Irish merits in the Peninsular as 'promptness to obey, a hilarity, a cheerful obedience, and willingness to act'. Here the speaker serves literally as a mouthpiece for English views.<sup>128</sup> As for 'hilarity', Keating's papers contain more than

<sup>122</sup> NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), p.20. Eighty-eighth = 88<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers; Inniskillen' = 27<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Foot; Faugh-a-Ballagh ('clear the way') = regimental cry and nickname of 87<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers; Co.Down = 86<sup>th</sup> (Royal County Down) Foot.

<sup>123</sup> NAM, 7410-195 (Memoir of Lieutenant-Colonel W. Patterson), p.5; NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), p.18.

<sup>124</sup> NAM, 7609-55/2 (Papers of G.A. Keating), 'Song of the Battle Eve'.

<sup>125</sup> Watson, T. (2000). 'Indian and Irish Unrest in Kipling's *Kim*' in Chrisman & Parry (eds.), *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.111.

<sup>126</sup> Kipling, 'With the Main Guard', *Collected Short Stories*, i, 257.

<sup>127</sup> Jourdain, *Ranging Memories*, pp.83-4, 125-6.

<sup>128</sup> NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), p.26.

one joke of which a dozy Irishman is the inevitable butt. Moreover, the culturally-aware fusilier's recollection of a genuine clashing of East and West at Rawalpindi, in which some less-educated friends ignore his warning not to flirt with some Punjabi women and are nearly murdered by an angry mob, is at base a rather unhappy and ultimately prosaic misunderstanding. Nonetheless he embroiders this 'tay party' into an amusing anecdote of the feckless Irishman's penchant for getting into a scrape, and unselfconscious willingness to try a universal lingo with his fellow peasant. He sets it up as an encounter between India and the Irish race as a homogeneous whole, naming the soldiers involved as

Dan Hurley from Cork, O'Sullivan from Kerry, a Tipperary boy whose name I forget and your humble servant from the Co Antrim, a fairly representative party you'll allow.<sup>129</sup>

### *Negotiating the Stereotypes*

Keating and the old fusilier handle their blunter-minded countrymen with something approaching condescension, while seeking to exemplify the fighting spirit of the loyal Irishman in themselves. In this they perhaps aspire to the manner of the officers for whom, more so than the rank and file, identity is flexible and can be manipulated. The various characteristics which make up Irishness can be adopted or rejected for the individual advantage of a man like Kendal Coghill, who found an enjoyable outlet for his public school pugilism at Delhi in 1857. Although he holds the Adjutancy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bengal Europeans, his bravado is undercut by a social inferiority complex. Cutting a grotesquely comic figure amidst the ruins, among his brother officers he deploys his Irishness so as to be accepted as an Englishman. Coghill allows his comrades, including the dashing murderously William Hodson, to call him 'Paddy'.<sup>130</sup> He also contrives to loot jewellery by concealing it inside a broken down Irish cart, which he then purchases in the prize yard for four rupees, giving the impression that he is doing so for the sake of 'affection for anything reminding me of the ould country'. 'The National sentiment paid', he concludes. He even plays the fool with his Commanding Officer, who questions him on his recollections of first going into action. 'I really cant say Colonel I answered. I was only a lad freshly captured from Ireland and I think I thought it a hot sort of Donnybrook.'<sup>131</sup>

At almost the same time that Coghill was comparing an Indian battlefield with the famously riotous Dublin fair, another young officer, L.M. Buchanan of the Connaught Rangers, was doing the same with a festival witnessed in a Himalayan village.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, although Anglo-Irish officers might invoke an Irish idiom in their quest for personal advancement, it might be necessary for them to periodically denigrate their 'curiously Eastern' country or countrymen to brush off its Gaelic taint. 'A fine fighting

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, pp.11-12.

<sup>130</sup> NAM, 7207-4/1 (Mutiny Memoir of Lieutenant Kendal J.W. Coghill), p.19. As is evident from De Nie, *Eternal Paddy*, p.77, this diminutive was in common currency from at least 1800.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, pp.34-5, 40.

<sup>132</sup> Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), T.1644/3 (Diary of L.M. Buchanan), p.45, 26 June 1859. All PRONI quotations printed with permission of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland



lot, but a bit out of hand at times', remarked Gough off the 53<sup>rd</sup> Foot. Gough approved its 'wild Irish' charge, but did so as a level-headed English officer who knew how to handle and channel this loose-cannon fighting spirit. He had, however, his own reputation for impetuous assaults and for wasting lives, and so it may have been expedient for him not to associate too closely with this spirit.<sup>133</sup> Attachment to an Irish identity could undermine authority and standing. The Scotsman Private John Brown may have had General Napier's nationality in mind when he dubbed his address to the troops 'blarney in first rate style', while the old subadhar Sita Ram implies that this disrespect could extend to Indian troops.<sup>134</sup> The threat is more obvious in the case of brother officers. On a Himalayan hunting trip in the 1870s, Lieutenant Hugh Pearse delighted in the antics of his companion Fenico, evidently an Irish officer. Exasperating at times, Fenico nearly bores Pearse to sleep trying to prove that Moore was (excepting Shakespeare) the greatest poet who ever lived, but makes up for it with his hilarious inability to sit still when fishing. Fenico's finest hour arrives in a thunderstorm, when he hides in a schoolhouse 'frightened out of his wits and calling on all the saints in the calendar to save him'.<sup>135</sup> The Irishman's perspective on all this is unfortunately not discernible, but it was probably fear of suffering a similar fate which motivated Coghill to compare post-siege Delhi to a city in the grip of an Irish District Council, though stretching from Castletownshend to Bunlun.<sup>136</sup> Even the great Roberts did not escape. 'He is fickle,' brooded General MacGregor in his Afghanistan diary, 'like all Irishmen.'<sup>137</sup>

Such men, members of a nativised colonial class, retain a necessarily ambiguous relationship with the analogy between Irishness and Indianness. It is a comparison which springs to mind surprisingly easily in their perceptions of India. 'Amidst the strangeness it was pleasant to note a familiar touch', recalls Captain McKeag of his arrival in India in 1916. When asking a tonga-wallah for the fare, the 'little brown man' replied "'anything you like, Sahib", and touched his cap as if he had studied the gesture from the Dublin jarvey'. 'Though,' McKeag adds significantly, 'one missed the air of independence infused by our compatriot.'<sup>138</sup> But do men who might end up as jarveys co-operate in the comparison? Keating does betray an affinity, even affection for what Kipling's soldiers refer to as 'the Trap', and his position as a soldier affords him a certain liberality in his social intercourse. Nonetheless in his poetic description of the soldier's life in the Subcontinent he remains firmly an outsider, presumably to the British world as well as the Indian:

<sup>133</sup> Gough, *Old Memories*, p.181. This was especially so when Gough was writing, after the 53<sup>rd</sup> had earned a notorious reputation for harbouring Fenians when stationed in Dublin in the 1860s: Stanley, *White Mutiny*, p.71.

<sup>134</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, p.195.

<sup>135</sup> NAM, 7912-38 (Diary of H.W. Pearse), pp.195 (27 August 1878), 209 (12 September 1878), 202 (4 September 1878). Pearse was from King's Lynn: National Archives, Kew, WO 76/63, (Officers Service Records).

<sup>136</sup> NAM, 7207-4/1 (Mutiny Memoir of Lieutenant Kendal J.W. Coghill), pp.33-4.

<sup>137</sup> MacGregor, Sir C.M. (1985). *War in Afghanistan, 1879-80: the Personal Diary of Major General Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, p.86.

<sup>138</sup> IWM, 86/2/1 ('Letters from the East', memoirs of H.T.A. McKeag), p.3. With permission of Elizabeth and William Hunter of Holywood, Co. Down.

I wander forth to take the air  
And on the Indians stare.  
From smoky huts of m\_\_\_\_\_ <sup>139</sup>  
Those charcoal beauties issue forth.  
Sweet and dear angelic \_\_\_\_\_  
With snuff and butter coloured features.  
To approach them with a smile or bow  
Their glorious answer is Joe sahib Joe.  
My heart turns from them with a sigh  
To where my native country lies.  
No maiden slave doth range her plains  
No ray protrudes with vessels chains.  
But ranged in native beauty fair  
The mountain maids with raven hair. <sup>140</sup>

It is hard to imagine Keating applying the boot to tardy servants, and even on the battlefield he is moved to pity by the sight of an Afghan and his son lying dead together. <sup>141</sup> However, it seems unlikely that equation with Indians through the unpleasant, degrading or weak parts of the Celtic stereotype would have pleased Irish soldiers. Unlike officers, they could not nearly as easily cut themselves off from their Irish identity. They were left with several choices. If they were treated as children or animals, they could act accordingly. The social conditions which pushed men to behave in degraded and undignified ways were common to all. But if the characterisation of these traits as Irish was partly based on truth it was because these conditions were more acute for Irishmen. They were particularly looked down upon by officers and civilians. They had less prospects, less to gain, and therefore less reason to behave well. They may have felt the need to be violent to match their martial reputation, and racist to assert themselves as white men.

Alternatively, men could present themselves as members of the 'respectable poor'. Aspiration, to a degree, could exist in the British army, especially in India where there was frequent opportunity for medals, where expenses were low and a teetotaler could save his meagre wages, where a man could educate himself in his ample spare time, and where with the toleration of his superiors he could be a member of the ruling race instead of a corner-boy or guttersnipe. The education certificate James McConville earned in India helped him rise to the heights of Lieutenant-Colonel. Edward McCullagh, the son of a Dublin porter, did not achieve promotion but was nonetheless certified as 'a hard-working, steady, sober and honest man' by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant D. French, who accompanied his attestation with a somewhat paternalistic private note to his former charge, urging him to 'work hard and do well'. <sup>142</sup>

To achieve this state, however, it was necessary for aspiring rankers to emphasise their martial and loyal Irish virtues while shunning the vices. The diaries kept by Lance-

<sup>139</sup> 'Creatures' is probably the rhyme he is searching for.

<sup>140</sup> NAM, 7609-55/2 (Papers of G.A. Keating), 'India'. Although most of Keating's poems are copied from other sources, the incomplete appearance, uneven rhyme and Irish theme of this poem suggest his authorship. 'Joe sahib joe' = jao sahib (i.e. get you gone, sir).

<sup>141</sup> NAM, 7609-55/1 (Afghan Diary of G.A. Keating), pp.20-21, 23 April 1879.

<sup>142</sup> NAM, 1999-07-10 (Documents relating to Edward McCullagh).

Corporal J.A. Maxwell of the Royal Irish Rifles at Meerut and Maymyo in Burma are filled with such perfunctory disciplinary notes as 'Two men wilfully broke up their rifles to-day' and 'McClusky got the "Clink."' Almost the only occasion in 1911 which apparently warranted descriptive language was a 'parade in celebration of assumption of the title of Empress of India by her Regal Majesty Queen Victoria'.<sup>143</sup> In his study of Indian troops in the EIC armies, Kolff has shown how the peasant sepoy 'could ignore identities handed down to him, adopt new ones, or toy with them for a lifetime.'<sup>144</sup> Possibly in the early Company period a similar potential for self-invention was available to Irishmen such as the freebooter 'Raja from Tipperary', and it continued to be the case in settler societies like South Africa or Australia. But India was different. White men were not intended to settle, and even those who slunk beneath the official radar were governed by the rigid caste hierarchy which the British imposed on themselves as well as on their Indian subjects, of which martial race theory was only one offshoot. Therefore what flexibility for re-definition was permitted to Irishmen took place within the nexus of stereotype and national identity, through which in India some became practised at making cunning sideways movements. It was possible for such men to pick and choose facets of Irishness, and construct with their selections a 'good' Irish identity. Scott Cook has emphasised that the high noon of empire was an equinox at which the ideologies of imperialism and of Irish nationalism could be pursued in parallel.<sup>145</sup> Keating's is a 'healthy' national feeling, indulged in the safe language of Young Ireland romanticism. His invocation of Erin in Afghanistan is not to be scrutinised, but encouraged, for she needs such loyal devotees to keep her symbolic purity out of Fenian hands.

### *Switching Nationality*

The social pressures of the officers' mess, barrack-room and bazaar, then, could compel Irishmen to become truly Protean. They demonstrate that national identification is permeable, flexible, can be suppressed or abandoned and later revived, but that it can also come back to haunt a man. This did not mean necessarily the loss of nationality and the fate of an Ulyssean wanderer. The Company's men did commit themselves to a life abroad. But if their social aspirations were more circumscribed, soldiers in the British Army were sustained by the prospect of return. Homesickness like Keating's was clearly very common. But to actually go back to Ireland meant being only an Irishman – or possibly an Ulsterman – whereas abroad these men could be British, a privilege not within the grasp of 'native' troops. The younger son of an Athlone clergyman, John Edward Moffatt travelled to India as an army doctor in 1858. Referring in his journal to the seagoing qualities of 'our countrymen', he evidently means British or even Englishmen. But the long Cape voyage and melancholy sight of a maritime funeral led him to meditate on the necessity of keeping one foot on native soil:

<sup>143</sup> PRONI, T.3546/1/1-3 (Diaries of J.A. Maxwell), 1 March 1909, 27 March 1909 and 2 Jan 1911.

<sup>144</sup> Kolff, D.H.A. (1990). *Naukar, Rajput and sepoy : the ethnohistory of the military labour market in Hindustan, 1450-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.185.

<sup>145</sup> S.B. Cook, 'Irish Raj', p.508.

I believe there is no more unextinguishable feeling than that of craving return to the home of ones youth – I pity the man who has no nationality.<sup>146</sup>

Soldiers on colonial service can exhibit a split-nationality, identifying simultaneously as British and Irish. They can be publicly English but privately Irish, or air their Irishness in public as part of an aspiration to be British. To bid a fond farewell to ‘dear old England’ from an India-bound troopship is a pattern common to Anglo-Irish officers like Wolseley, but also to rankers like the old fusilier.<sup>147</sup> ‘Roll on Blighty’ was the expression constantly heard by Private Henry Brooks of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, when stationed at Secunderabad shortly before the First World War.<sup>148</sup>

The overarching structure that permits this switching remains the regimental identity, its power demonstrated by the ability to ‘convert’ recruits to its regimental nationality. In contrast to Irish soldiers who bid adieu to Dover cliffs, a spell in the Royal Irish Rifles sufficed to make the Kent man George Horton wonder sadly ‘how many would return to see those green hills again’, on departing ‘old Ireland’ for the colonies.<sup>149</sup> David McAusland was born in Abbey Parish, Belfast, but he took to the Black Watch with such alacrity that only a consultation of the regimental description book assures one that he was not Scottish. He intersperses his memoir with poems glorifying Scotland and the 42<sup>nd</sup>. Worshipping Sir Colin Campbell as other Irishmen adored Roberts, he proudly recalls the day when ‘the old Chief’ rode up to him in person:

seeing the Crimean Medal on My breast he Said My Old Friends the 42<sup>nd</sup> I said yes Sir ... I have a fine Job for you all tomorrow Morning he Meant the driving of the rebel Army away from Around Cawnpore.<sup>150</sup>

Common to both these men however is an imperial sense of the world and a pride to have played the game wherever they were sent. Liam Ó Murchú recalled bitterly the ‘brain washing’ his father received from the Dublin Fusiliers. A ‘six week voyage on a troop ship was long enough to cut the cord of memory and launch him headlong into the new colonial world.’<sup>151</sup> But the records of these men suggest that their national identities were not erased but absorbed into a feeling of belonging to an imperial race. Keating repeatedly copies out division orders and congratulatory telegrams of senior officers, along with the complete service record of Lord Roberts, while Private Brooks articulates his own position in India with reference to colonial history. Obviously intending his memoir to be read, he includes a brief and somewhat misinformed history of the Mutiny, and concludes his narrative by predicting the gradual submission of India to ‘British Law

<sup>146</sup> OIOC, Mss.Eur.A.129 (Diary of J.E. Moffatt), 3 October 1858 and 8 Oct 1858.

<sup>147</sup> Wolseley, *Soldier's Life*, p.15; NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), p.5.

<sup>148</sup> PRONI, D.3507/3 (Diary of Private Henry Brooks), p.26.

<sup>149</sup> Royal Ulster Rifles Regimental Museum, Memoir of Sergeant George Horton, pp.3, 36. With permission of the Royal Ulster Rifles Museum, Belfast.

<sup>150</sup> Black Watch Regimental Archive, 0002 (Description Book, 42<sup>nd</sup>, 1795-1874) and 0214 (Memoir: Private David McAusland, 42<sup>nd</sup>), pp.53-8, 69, 72. With permission of the Black Watch Regimental Museum, Perth.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Denman, ‘Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple?’, p.270.

and order'. Repeating the maxims of the civilising mission, he awaits her establishment as 'a commercial country of first rate importance'.<sup>152</sup>

This is not to suggest of course that all Irish soldiers were obedient imperialists. The old fusilier recalls three men trying to shoot their superiors.<sup>153</sup> Gonne and MacBride, as already mentioned, made recruitment itself became a nationalist battleground during the Boer War. But, for the time being, the army held the representational trump. Despite their challenge its ability to reduce Irish efforts at self-definition into mere types remained undiminished, and ultimately all such types – good and 'black', reformed and incorrigible – feed back into the Protean image of the Irish soldier. Those who understood this discourse were capable of negotiating their Irishness through the imperial idiom. The effect this ultimately had on Irish society has been underestimated, and given a different course of events it may even have prevailed in Irish life and politics.

### *The Fraternity of Exiles*

However, regimental nationalism also lent itself to structures of corporate identity which stood apart from official channels. The growth of Freemasonry was closely tied to the army population, more than fifteen Irish military Lodges being established in India during the colonial period, often connected with specific regiments. The papers of Anketell Moutray contain sizeable correspondence related to the Connaught Rangers lodge which he founded, and Orange Lodges enjoyed a similar worldwide appeal.<sup>154</sup> Even without an institutional basis, the Company period in particular saw networks form within and between Irish-dominated regiments along which news about home regions and towns travelled between men with common roots.<sup>155</sup> Messes frequently raised subscriptions to commemorate fallen officers, but an inscription at Kamptee Catholic cemetery, it appears, was paid for by the rank and file of the Munster Fusiliers:

This monument was erected by their brother soldiers and fellow townsmen of Limerick City Counties, Tipperary and Clare as a lasting tribute to their memories.<sup>156</sup>

L.M. Buchanan strongly approved of his own Connaught Rangers 'fraternising' with the Royal Irish Fusiliers at Delhi in 1860: 'a splendid Regt ... like ourselves their men are exclusively Irish'.<sup>157</sup> But he would not have smiled at Cork friends Farrier Murphy and Private Denine exchanging notes one year before on the 'Tyranny' of the military authorities. Officers realised that disaffection in the army would likely develop and spread through these 'townsmen' relationships, just as Irish rebellions typically struck

<sup>152</sup> PRONI, D.3507/3 (Diary of Private Henry Brooks), p.53.

<sup>153</sup> NAM, 1999-11-150 (Speech of former member of Royal Irish Fusiliers), pp.13-14, 16.

<sup>154</sup> Grand Masonic Lodge of Ireland, Maarfatia, C.K., 'Irish Military Lodges in Western India and the Coromandel'; PRONI, D.2023/12/1 (Papers of A.G. Moutray); Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire', p.99.

<sup>155</sup> Stanley, *White Mutiny*, pp.64-5.

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Hewson, E. (2004). *The Forgotten Irish: Memorials of the Raj*, Kabristan Archives, Wem, Shropshire, p.81.

<sup>157</sup> PRONI, T.1644/3 (Diary of L.M. Buchanan), p.61.

sparks in the hot forge of local deprivations and resentments.<sup>158</sup> The supplanting of local affinities with membership of the homogenizing military 'fraternity' served to counter this trend. Murphy's complaints are an example of the former and his turn of phrase - 'this station that they transported us into is the devils own place' - is significant. The comparison of Company soldiers to entrapped convicts was in currency both as mockery and self-pity.<sup>159</sup> As Kenny has argued, the sense of exile felt by individuals obliged to emigrate or enter imperial service is not to be underestimated as a defining feature of their identity.<sup>160</sup> Even in Keating's case, the repetition of a theme in his collected ballads is impressive: 'Dublin bay', 'Limerick is beautiful', 'Kathleen Mavourneen' and the entirety of Campbell's 'The Exile of Erin'. The Irish military identity in India may have generally remained dependent on the British imperial identity, lacking a mode of expression that was not prefabricated. But it remained, if only tenuously, tied firstly to something else, personal and unquantifiable, back home, and secondly to the experience of separation from that home. Hence social organisations based around that personal connection, lying beyond the military remit, exist in an ambiguous relationship to the regiment. Irish imperial Lodges may no longer in this period have been a much-resented harbour of Masonic dissent and shabby characters excluded from English foundations. Rather they were an unofficial arena of regimental patronage and promotion.<sup>161</sup> But the consolidation within them of Unionist politics by an influential figure like Moutray, while largely in keeping with the conservative tenor of the officer corps, nonetheless demonstrates that Irish social institutions were permeable on both sides. If the social forces within them were largely yoked to regimental affairs, home interests could also seep in with the latest newspapers and each incoming member. The politicisation of Irish soldiers, then, is not a movement which needs to be tracked or an event which needs to be dated. As long as they remained a body drawn together by a corporate feeling they constituted a political body set apart from other soldiers, inherently a danger. Peter Karsten has argued that, despite such crises as the Fenian infiltration of the 1860s, the Irish soldier remained largely subordinate.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, quiescence was largely assured for an extended period because Irish social institutions smoothly channelled this corporate feeling upwards into regimental promotion and imperial aspiration. But they remained an unsealable membrane through which political interest groups could make an entry. The question of politicisation in the army is not actually one of activism, national awakening or even resistance to cultural hegemony. The 1910s did in fact see the significant permeation into the ranks of a political mood, but it was triggered fundamentally by a crisis of identity.

### *The War of Identities*

<sup>158</sup> Note, for example, that one of the first actions taken against the Jullunder Mutiny of 1920 (discussed in the next section), was the suspension of soldiers' mail.

<sup>159</sup> OIOC, P/191/25 (Indian Military Proceedings, 17 June 1859), no.581 (letter from Farrier A. Murphy, Bengal Horse Artillery to Private Patrick Denine, 1<sup>st</sup> Bengal Fusiliers, 20 May 1859); Stanley, *White Mutiny*, p.37.

<sup>160</sup> Kenny, 'The Irish in the Empire,' pp.100-1.

<sup>161</sup> Harland-Jacobs, J.L. (2007). *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717-1927*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, pp.2, 7; Richards, *Old Soldier Sahib*, p.157.

<sup>162</sup> Karsten, *Suborned or Subordinate?*, pp.51-4.

Have just heard from father that you stopped one in Dublin. I was very sorry to hear it indeed; but was good to know it was only a flesh wound ... You must be having some exciting times in Dublin these days if all the papers say is true. I wonder how it will end.<sup>163</sup>

So Gerald Little consoled his brother in a letter from Delhi in July 1920, showing how even the most callow officer, preoccupied with promotion, was obliged to pay attention to events at home. Although he may not have realised it, the evocation of Irish martiality and heroism by civilian paramilitaries was the death knell of the all-Irish regimental culture that he had entered upon his commission in the 'Royal Dubs'. Irishmen now had a choice of armies to join, and their choice would determine what sort of Irish they were. The dichotomy that they had long negotiated between the 'good' and 'black' sides of their national stereotype was now politically divided. What has not been appreciated is that home tidings did not only exert a social pressure on Irishmen to declare themselves nationalists but also on Ulstermen to call themselves such and Unionists. At least after the signing of the Ulster Covenant, diehard unionism may have indeed posed just as much of a divisive threat to military discipline as do-or-die nationalism, as in the case of the 'Curragh Mutiny' of 1914. Jimmy Tate, a Lieutenant in the Indian Public Works Department, had likely followed this incident in the news, and in 1917 he thanked his parents for keeping him up to date with the Ulster Volunteers. 'They still seem to be scrapping about home rule', he confided to his father. 'I hope the Whiteabbey Company is still ready to give them a good beating.'<sup>164</sup> Meanwhile at Kanpur, just three weeks before the Easter Rising, M. Murphy signed what was probably his last ever letter home to his wife 'your fond husband and fenian'.<sup>165</sup>

Murphy may have used the word in a sentimental sense to mean an Irish warrior, but its political meaning was certainly well-established. The ambiguity is indicative of the rupture in the longstanding continuum between Irish origin and Irish military identity. Desperate to boost flagging Irish enlistment for the Western Front, the army commissioned exploitative recruitment posters urging men to sign up for Erin, for the shamrock, for tradition, adventure and even for St Patrick. Their very shrillness suggests the weakening and contradiction of the army's cultural grip.<sup>166</sup> Officers and men were left on opposite sides of diverging loyalties. Having recently returned to Ireland from the Indian theatre, the Masonic aficionado Moutray found himself on the point of pulling his revolver on a Connaught Ranger. To the officer's horror, the 'dirty dog' objected to joining a flying column to hunt down his own countrymen. The violence of his reaction may have owed something to the fierce climate of suspicion in which even this arch-Unionist was suspected by his brother officers of disloyalty. Failure to stand for the national anthem at the Chamba Club, Dalhousie in 1913 had set off a series of private interviews and correspondence which nearly concluded with Moutray's retirement.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> National Library of Ireland (hereafter NLI), MS15507 (Letters of Gerald Little), to Esmonde 26 July 1920. With the Permission of The Board of The National Library of Ireland.

<sup>164</sup> PRONI, D.2859/4/28 (Tate family papers, letter from Jimmy Tate to father from Mesopotamia).

<sup>165</sup> NLI, MS24198 (Letter from M. Murphy to Ellen Murphy, 4 April 1916). With the Permission of The Board of The National Library of Ireland.

<sup>166</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, 'Irish Military Tradition,' p.13.

<sup>167</sup> PRONI, D.2023/11/1 (Papers of A.G. Moutray).

It was not long before the regiment was posted back to India, and it in this context that the mutiny of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in 1920 should be understood. As Lieutenant Little nonchalantly reflected on civil strife, more than eighty men at Jullunder and Solon ground arms in reaction to British atrocities in Ireland, sparking a paranoia of Irish combination and frantic censoring of soldiers' correspondence.<sup>168</sup> Although the nationalist significance of the protest has been both exaggerated and downplayed, the finding by a member of the guard of the letters 'IRA' carved into the bedsteads of every cell in which mutineers were housed at Dagshai suggests that the event was more than a freak flash in the hot pan of the Indian summer. More suspect but, nonetheless, suggestive local evidence has it that a man on furlough threw off his uniform onto a Roscommon railway platform upon hearing the news of the Jullunder mutiny.<sup>169</sup> Any republican infiltration notwithstanding, it seems likely that these men were responding to external pressure in the same fashion as the Munster Fusiliers who are reported to have sworn a public oath in 1917 that they were as good nationalists as any Sinn Féiner. Branded as traitors by their republican countrymen and regarded with suspicion by their British comrades, rash gestures were made by these men in a 'losing battle to defend their Irishness'. Many soldiers expected Home Rule, but first victory.<sup>170</sup> Instead, not only were they pressured to give up the service which represented their social worth and retirement security. Ultimately their martial identity itself had been appropriated by the disciplined, unsmiling but astonishingly Irish martyrdom of the Easter Rebels. Those who gave their rifles away to insurgents may not have done so wholly out of sympathy, but because the retention of a soldier's identity would necessitate joining them. Only self-abnegation was left to men who were no longer permitted to reconcile their nationality to their profession.

### Conclusion

As the Anglo-Irish War entered its final phase, the Leinsters were in western India putting down the Moplah uprising of 1921. It was the last campaign fought by a southern Irish regiment for the British Army. Within fifteen months five had convened with bands playing to lay up their colours at Windsor Castle. At Rawalpindi, the departing Connaught Rangers paraded alongside the 27<sup>th</sup> Punjabis, the visiting Prince of Wales showing no sense of irony when he praised them, together, as the battle-scarred representatives of 'the Fighting Province'.<sup>171</sup>

What followed disbandment was a process of contiguity and of negotiation with the past. Men like Colonel Chavasse could still manage to straddle independent Ireland and imperial Britain. Entering his Anglo-Irish-dominated officers' mess in 1930s Bombay, his brother was 'regaled with iced John Jameson and water (delectable elixir), and

<sup>168</sup> Babington, A. (1991). *The Devil to Pay: the Mutiny of the Connaught Rangers, India, July, 1920*, Cooper, London, pp.27, 41.

<sup>169</sup> IWM, MISC 3152/2/8 and MISC 3152/2/27 (Jesse Short Collection, letter of William Gould, Welsh Regiment and letter of Anthony MacDonnell).

<sup>170</sup> NAM, 1989-12-60 (unpublished book: Martin Staunton, *A Social History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers*) pp.172-3; Verney, *The Micks*, p.46.

<sup>171</sup> Bartlett, 'Irish Soldier in India', p.26; Jourdain, *Connaught Rangers*, i, 576, 572-3.



gramophone record of reels and hornpipes'.<sup>172</sup> For discarded private soldiers this was not possible. Irish society failed to integrate these men, many of whom would have called themselves patriots. Some even paid with their lives for their prior associations. A new narrative of the imperial experience was being told, and they did not fit with the rebel identity that was being built from such mythologised sources as the biased and self-laudatory witness statements of the Jullunder mutiny. The romance of the wandering Irish mercenary has survived the passing of empire, because he has changed to a figure of discontent, resistance or victimhood from one of loyalty, imperial aspiration and hope of social advancement.

This has not prevented the men who once subscribed to the latter identity from keeping up the connection with their erstwhile 'townie' comrades. Dinners in honour of long-disbanded regiments continued for decades after Irish independence. Still using words like 'dekko' and 'pukka', veterans survived as reminders of a period in which imperial militarism had buttressed Irish social order not merely with the bayonet but, more pervasively, with an appealing and all-encompassing identity. James McConville died at Worthing in 1969 one month after a final visit to his native city. In the words of a sensitive obituary, he remained unshaken in 'a loyalty to his faith and to his profession that to him, a Belfast Roman Catholic, suggested no inconsistency'.<sup>173</sup> Service in India for him was more than the last stop after the bottle works. It was in his teenage years the making not only of his career but of an identity which remained with him permanently. In his own words a contented 'Exile from Ireland', in 1966 he wrote to BBC Northern Ireland demanding that at least three quarters of their airtime should be devoted to Irish airs. To justify his request, he recalled the revivifying effect such music could have on a man after a long route march:

About half a mile from Shahjehanpur to our great surprise the Band of the Devonshire Regt. was awaiting us kindly sent by their Colonel, and so to the strains of the "Exile from Erin" we were played by the Devons Band in Shahjehanpur. I believe it was New Year's Eve 1904.<sup>174</sup>

## Appendix: Numbers of Irish Infantry Regiments

The names given in bold text are regiments established or reformed by the 1881 British Army reforms. The names given below in plain text are the regiments which were amalgamated to form them.

### **The Royal Irish Regiment**

18<sup>th</sup> (The Royal Irish) Regiment of Foot

<sup>172</sup> IWM, 98/23A ('Some Memories of my Life', by Kendal Chavasse), p.36. Every effort has been made to seek permission for this quotation but the copyright holder could not be found.

<sup>173</sup> NAM, 7408-82-1 ('Memories' of James McConville), preface.

<sup>174</sup> NAM, 7408-82-48 (Letters of James McConville), 7 June 1966.

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**The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers**

27<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Regiment of Foot

108<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (Madras Infantry)

**53<sup>rd</sup> (Shropshire) Regiment of Foot**, after 1881 the King's Shropshire Light Infantry  
(often said to have been Irish-dominated in the 1850s)

**The Royal Irish Rifles**

83<sup>rd</sup> (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot

86<sup>th</sup> (Royal County Down) Regiment of Foot

**(Princess Victoria's) Royal Irish Fusiliers**

87<sup>th</sup> (Royal Irish Fusiliers) Regiment of Foot

89<sup>th</sup> (The Princess Victoria's) Regiment of Foot

**The Connaught Rangers**

88<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (Connaught Rangers)

94<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot

**The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)**

100<sup>th</sup> (Prince of Wales's Royal Canadian) Regiment of Foot

109<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (Bombay Infantry)

**The Royal Munster Fusiliers**

101<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot (Royal Bengal Fusiliers)

104<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (Bengal Fusiliers)

**The Royal Dublin Fusiliers**

102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot (Royal Madras Fusiliers)

103<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot (Royal Bombay Fusiliers)